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THE LIFE OF SWINBURNE



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THE LIFE
OF
SWINBURNE

BY
EDMUND GOSSE

WITH A
LETTER ON SWINBURNE AT ETON
BY
LORD REDESDALE



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PREFACE

THE brief record of Swinburne's Life, which occupies the ensuing pages, has been compiled, almost entirely from hitherto unpublished sources, at the request of Sir Sidney Lee, and will appear in the third volume of the new Supplement of the Dictionary of National Biography. I have added to it a letter, written to me by Lord Redesdale, which contains valuable information regarding the school-days of the poet, who was the writer's first cousin and close friend. This is here printed, for the first time, with Lord Redesdale's very kind consent.

EDMUND GOSSE.

15th May 1912.

THE LIFE OF SWINBURNE

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE was born in Chester Street, Grosvenor Place, London, on 5 April 1837. He was the eldest child of Admiral Charles Henry Swinburne (1797-1877), by his wife Lady Jane Henrietta (1809-1896), daughter of George Ashburnham, third Earl of Ashburnham. His father was second son of Sir John Edward Swinburne (1762-1860), sixth baronet, of Capheaton, in Northumberland. This baronet, who exercised a strong influence over his grandson, the poet, had been born and brought up in France, and cultivated the memory of Mirabeau. In habits, dress, and modes of thought he was like a French nobleman of the *ancien régime*. From his father, a cut-and-dried unimaginative old "salt," the poet inherited little but a certain identity of colour and expression; his features and something of his mental character were his mother's. Lady Jane was a woman of exquisite accomplishment, and widely read in foreign

literature. From his earliest years Algernon was trained, by his grandfather and by his mother, in the French and Italian languages. He was brought up, with the exception of long visits to Northumberland, in the Isle of Wight, his grandparents residing at the Orchard, Niton, Ventnor, and his parents at East Dene, Bonchurch.

He had been born all but dead and was not expected to live an hour; but though he was always nervous and slight, his childhood, spent mainly in the open air, was active and healthy. His parents were high-church and he was brought up as "a quasi-catholic." He recollected in after years the enthusiasm with which he welcomed the process of confirmation, and his "ecstasies of adoration when receiving the Sacrament." He early developed a love for climbing, riding, and swimming, and never cared, through life, for any other sports. His father, the admiral, taught him to plunge in the sea when he was still almost an infant, and he was always a fearless and, in relation to his physique, a powerful swimmer. "He could swim and walk for ever" (LORD REDESDALE). He was prepared for Eton by Collingwood Forster Fenwick, rector of Brook, near Newport, Isle of Wight, who expressed his surprise at finding the child so deeply read in

certain directions; Algernon having, from a very early age, been "privileged to have a book at meals" (MRS. DISNEY LEITH).

He came to Eton at Easter 1849, arriving, "a queer little elf, who carried about with him a Bowdlerised Shakespeare, adorned with a blue silk book-marker, with a Tunbridge-ware button at the end of it" (LORD REDESDALE). This volume had been given to him by his mother when he was six years of age. Up to the time of his going to Eton he had never been allowed to read a novel, but he immediately plunged into the study of Dickens, as well as of Shakespeare (released from Bowdler), of the old dramatists, of every species of lyrical poetry. The embargo being now raised, he soon began to read everything. "It is difficult to say what, at the age of twelve, Swinburne did not know, and, what is more, appreciate, of English literature" (SIR GEORGE YOUNG). He devoured even that ~~didactic~~ anthology the "*Poetæ Græci*," a book which he long afterwards said "had played a large part in fostering the love of poetry in his mind" (A. G. C. LIDDELL). In 1850 his mother gave him Dyce's Marlowe, and he soon knew Ford and Webster. He began, before he was fourteen, to collect rare editions of the dramatists. Any

day he could be found in a ~~bay~~ window of the college library, the sunlight on his hair, and his legs always crossed tailor-wise, with a folio as big as himself spread open upon his knees. The librarian, "Grub" Brown, used to point him out, thus, to strangers as one of the curiosities of Eton. He boarded at Joynes's, who was his tutor; Hawtrey was head-master.

It has been falsely said that Swinburne was bullied at Eton. On the contrary, there was "something a little formidable about him" (SIR GEORGE YOUNG), considerable tact (LORD REDESDALE), and a great, even audacious, courage, which kept other boys at a distance. He did not dislike Eton, but he cultivated few friendships; he did not desire school honours, he never attempted any game or athletics, and he was looked upon as odd and unaccountable, and so left alone to his omnivorous reading. He was a kind of fairy, a privileged creature. Lord Redesdale recalls his taking "long walks in Windsor Forest, always with a single friend, Swinburne dancing as he went, and reciting from his inexhaustible memory the works which he had been studying in his favourite sunlighted window." Sir George Young has described him vividly: "his hands and feet all going" while

he talked; "his little white face, and great auricle of hair, and green eyes," the hair standing out in a bush of "three different colours and textures, orange-red, dark red, and bright pure gold." Charles Dickens, at Bonchurch in 1849, was struck with "the golden-haired lad of the Swinburnes" whom his own boys used to play with, and when he went to congratulate the poet on "Atalanta" in 1865, he reminded him of this earlier meeting. In 1851 Algernon "passed" in swimming, and at this time, in the holidays, caused some anxiety by his recklessness in riding and climbing; he swarmed up the Culver Cliff, hitherto held to be impregnable, a feat of which he was proud to the end of his life.

Immediately on his arrival at Eton he had attacked the poetry of Wordsworth. In September 1849 he was taken by his parents to visit that poet in the Lakes; Wordsworth, who was very gracious, said in parting that he did not think that Algernon "would forget" him, whereupon the little boy burst into tears (MISS SEWELL'S *Autobiography*). Earlier in the same year Lady Jane had taken her son to visit Rogers in London; and on this old man also the child made a strong impression. Rogers laid his hand on Algernon's head in parting, and said, "I think that you will be a poet, too!" He

was, in fact, now writing verses, some of which his mother sent to "Fraser's Magazine," where they appeared, with his initials, in 1849 and again in 1851; but of this "false start" he was afterwards not pleased to be reminded. It is interesting that at the age of fourteen many of his life-long partialities and prejudices were formed; in the course of 1851 we find him immersed in Landor, Shelley and Keats, in the "Orlando Furioso" and in the tragedies of Corneille, and valuing them as he did throughout his life; while, on the other hand, already hating Euripides, insensible to Horace, and injurious to Racine.

In the catholicity of his poetic taste there was one odd exception; he had promised his mother, whom he adored, not to read Byron, and in fact did not open that poet till he went to Oxford. In 1852, reading much French with Tarver, "Notre Dame de Paris" introduced him to Victor Hugo. He now won the second Prince Consort's prize for French and Italian, and in 1853 the first prizes for French and Italian. His Greek elegiacs were greatly admired. He was, however, making no real progress at school, and was chafing against the discipline; in the summer of 1853 he had trouble with Joynes, of a rebellious kind, and did not return to Eton, "although

nothing had been said during the half about his leaving" (SIR G. YOUNG). When he left he was within a few places of the head-master's division.

In 1854 there was some talk of his being trained for the army, which he greatly desired; but this was abandoned on account of the slightness and shortness of his figure. All his life he continued to regret the military profession. He was prepared for Oxford, in a desultory way, by John Wilkinson, perpetual curate of Cambo in Northumberland, who said that he "was too clever and would never study." On 24 Jan. 1856 Swinburne matriculated at Balliol College, Oxford, and he kept terms regularly through the years 1856, 1857, and 1858. After the first year his high-church proclivities fell from him and he became a nihilist in religion and a republican. He had portraits of Mazzini in his rooms, and declaimed verses to them (LORD SHEFFIELD); in the spring of 1857 he wrote an "Ode to Mazzini," not yet published, which is his earliest work of any maturity. In this year, while at Capheaton, he formed the friendship of Lady Trevelyan and Miss Capel Lofft, and was for the next four years a member of their cultivated circle at Wallington. Here Ruskin met him, and formed a very high opinion of his imaginative

capacities. In the autumn Edwin Hatch introduced him to D. G. Rossetti, who was painting in the Union, and in December the earliest of Swinburne's contributions to "Undergraduate Papers" appeared. To this time belong his friendships with John Nichol, E. Burne-Jones, W. Morris, and Spencer Stanhope. Early in 1858 he was writing his tragedy of "Rosamond," a poem on "Tristram," and planning a drama on "The Albigenses." In March 1858 Swinburne dined at Farringford with Tennyson, who thought him "a very modest and intelligent young fellow" and read "Maud" to him, urging upon him a special devotion to Virgil. In April the last of the "Undergraduate Papers" appeared.

In the Easter term Swinburne took a second in moderations, and won the Taylorian scholarship for French and Italian. ~~When at Eton he had twice (in 1849 and 1852) paid brief visits to Paris.~~ He now accompanied his parents to France for a longer time. The attempt of Orsini, in January 1858, to murder Napoleon III had found an enthusiastic admirer in Algernon, who decorated his rooms at Oxford with Orsini's portrait, and proved an embarrassing fellow-traveller in Paris to his parents. He kept the Lent and Easter terms of 1859 at Balliol, and when the

Austrian war broke out in May, he spoke at the Union, "reading excitedly but ineffectively a long tirade against Napoleon and in favour of Orsini and Mazzini" (LORD SHEFFIELD). He began to be looked upon as "dangerous," and Jowett, who was much interested in him, expressed an extreme dread that the college might send him down and so "make Balliol as ridiculous as University had made itself about Shelley." At this time Swinburne had become what he continued to be for the rest of his life, a high tory republican. He cultivated few friends except those who immediately interested him poetically and politically. But he was a member of the club called the Old Mortality, in which he was associated with Nichol, Dicey, Luke (who was drowned in 1861), T. H. Green, Caird, and Pater, besides Mr. Bryce and Mr. Bywater.

Jowett thought it well that Swinburne should leave Oxford for a while at the end of Easter term, 1859, and sent him to read modern history with William Stubbs at Navestock. Here Swinburne recited to his host and hostess a tragedy he had just completed (probably "The Queen Mother"). In consequence of some strictures made by Stubbs, Swinburne destroyed the only draft of the play, but was able

to write it all out again from memory. He was back at the university from 14 Oct. to 21 Nov., when he was principally occupied in writing a three-act comedy in verse in the manner of Fletcher, now lost; it was called "Laugh and Lie Down." He had lodgings in Broad Street, where the landlady made complaints of his late hours and general irregularities. Jowett was convinced that he was doing no good at Oxford, and he left without taking a degree. His father was greatly displeased with him, but Algernon withdrew to Capheaton, until, in the spring of 1860, he came to London, and took rooms near Russell Place to be close to the Burne-Joneses. He now received a very small allowance from his father, and gave up the idea of preparing for any profession. Capheaton was still his summer home, but when Sir John Swinburne died (26 Sept. 1860) Algernon went to the William Bell Scotts' in Newcastle for some time. His first book, "The Queen Mother and Rosamond," was published before Christmas; it fell dead from the press.

When Algernon returned to London early in 1861 his friendship with D. G. Rossetti became intimate; for the next ten years they "lived on terms of affectionate intimacy; shaped and col-

oured, on his side, by cordial kindness and exuberant generosity, on mine by gratitude as loyal and admiration as fervent as ever strove and ever failed to express all the sweet and sudden passion of youth towards greatness in its elder" (from an unpublished statement, written by Swinburne in 1882). This was by far the most notable experience in Swinburne's career. Rossetti developed, restrained and guided, with marvellous skill, the genius of "my little Northumbrian friend," as he used to call him. Under his persuasion Swinburne was now writing some of his finest early lyrics, and was starting a cycle of prose tales, to be called "The Tiameron"; this was to consist of some twenty stories. Of these "Dead Love" alone was printed in his lifetime; but others exist unpublished, the most interesting being "The Marriage of Mona Lisa," "A Portrait," and "Queen Fredegonde."

In the summer of 1861 he was introduced to Monckton Milnes, who actively interested himself in Swinburne's career. Early in 1862 Henry Adams, the American writer, then acting as Monckton Milnes's secretary, met Swinburne at Fyston on an occasion which he has described in his privately printed diary. The company also included Stirling of Keir (afterwards Sir W.

Stirling-Maxwell) and Laurence Oliphant, and all Milnes's guests made Swinburne's acquaintance for the first time. He reminded Adams of "a tropical bird," "a crimson macaw among owls"; and it was on this occasion that Stirling, in a phrase often misquoted, likened him to "the Devil entered into the Duke of Aigyll." All the party, though prepared by Milnes's report, were astounded at the flow, the volume and the character of the young man's conversation; "Voltaire's seemed to approach nearest to the pattern"; "in a long experience, before or after, no one ever approached it." The men present were brilliant and accomplished, but they "could not believe in Swinburne's incredible memory and knowledge of literature, classic, mediæval and modern, nor know what to make of his rhetorical recitation of his own unpublished lyrics, "Faustine," "The Four Boards of the Coffin Lid" [a poem published as "After Death"], "The Ballad of Burdens," which he declaimed as though they were books of the "Iliad." These parties at Fryston were probably the beginning of the social "legend" of Swinburne, which preceded and encouraged the reception of his works a few years later. It was at Milnes's house that he met and formed an instant friendship with

Richard Burton. The relationship which ensued was not altogether fortunate. Burton was a giant and an athlete, one of the few men who could fire an old-fashioned elephant-gun from his shoulder, and drink a bottle of brandy without feeling any effect from it. Swinburne, on the contrary, was a weakling. He tried to compete with the "hero" in Dr. Johnson's sense, and he failed.

He was being painted by Rossetti in February 1862 when the wife of the latter died so tragically; Swinburne gave evidence at the inquest (12 Feb.). He was now intimate with George Meredith, who printed, shortly before his death, an account of the overwhelming effect of Fitzgerald's "Rubaiyat" upon Swinburne, and the consequent composition of "Laus Veneris," probably in the spring of 1862. In this year Swinburne began to write, in prose as well as in verse, for the "Spectator," which printed "Faustine" and six other important poems, and (6 Sept.) a very long essay on Baudelaire's "Fleurs du Mal," written in a Turkish bath in Paris. A review of one of Victor Hugo's books, forwarded to the French poet, opened Swinburne's personal relations with that chief of his literary heroes. He now finished "Chastelard," on which he had long been engaged, and in October his prose

story, "Dead Love," was printed in "Once a Week" (this appeared in book form in 1864). Swinburne joined Meredith and the Rossettis (24 Oct. 1862) in the occupation of Tudor House, 16 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. D. G. Rossetti believed that it would be good for Swinburne to be living in the household of friends who would look after him without seeming to control him, since life in London lodgings was proving rather disastrous. Swinburne's extremely nervous organization laid him open to great dangers, and he was peculiarly unfitted for dissipation. Moreover, about this time he began to be afflicted with what is considered to have been a form of epilepsy, which made it highly undesirable that he should live alone.

In Paris, during a visit in March 1863, he had made the acquaintance of Whistler, whom he now introduced to Rossetti. Swinburne became intimate with Whistler's family, and after a fit in the summer of 1863 in the American painter's studio, he was nursed through the subsequent illness by the mother of Whistler. On his convalescence he was persuaded, in October, to go down to his father's house at East Dene, near Bonchurch, where he remained for five months and entirely recovered his health and spirits. He

brought with him the opening of "Atalanta in Calydon," which he completed at East Dene. For a story called "The Children of the Chapel," which was being written by his cousin, Mrs. Disney Leith, he wrote at the same time a morality, "The Pilgrimage of Pleasure," which appeared, without his name, in March 1864. From the Isle of Wight, at the close of February 1864, Swinburne went abroad for what was to remain the longest foreign tour of his life. He passed through Paris, where he saw Fantin-Latour, and proceeded to Hyères, where Milnes had a villa, and so to Italy. From Rossetti he had received an introduction to Seymour Kirkup, then the centre of a literary circle in Florence, and Milnes added letters to Landor and to Mrs. Gaskell. Swinburne found Landor in his house in Via della Chiesa, close to the church of the Carmine, on 31 March, and he visited the art-galleries of Florence in the company of Mrs. Gaskell. In a garden at Fiesole he wrote "Itylus" and "Dolores." Two autumn months of this year (1864) were spent in Cornwall, at Tintagel (in company with Jowett), at Kynance Cove, and at St. Michael's Mount. On his return to London he went into lodgings at 22A Dorset Street, where he remained for several years.

"Atalanta in Calydon," in a cream-coloured binding with mystical ornaments by D. G. Rossetti, was published by Edward Moxon in April 1865. At this time Swinburne, although now entering his twenty-ninth year, was entirely unknown outside a small and dazzled circle of friends, but the success of "Atalanta" was instant and overwhelming. Ruskin welcomed it as "the grandest thing ever done by a youth—though he is a Demoniac youth" (E. T. Cook's *Life of Ruskin*). In consequence of its popularity, the earlier tragedy of "Chastelard" was now brought forward and published in December of the same year. This also was warmly received by the critics, but there were murmurs heard as to its supposed sensuality. This was the beginning of the outcry against Swinburne's literary morals, and even "Atalanta" was now searched for evidences of atheism and indelicacy.

He met, on the other hand, with many assurances of eager support, and in particular, in November 1865, he received a letter from a young Welsh squire, George E. J. Powell of Nant-Eôls (1842-82), who soon became, and for several years remained, the most intimate of Swinburne's friends. The collection of lyrical poems, written during the last eight years, which

was now almost ready, was felt by Swinburne's circle to be still more dangerous than anything which he had yet published; early in 1866 (probably in January) the long ode called "*Laus Veneris*" was printed in pamphlet form, as the author afterwards stated, "more as an experiment to ascertain the public taste—and forbearance!—than anything else. Moxon, I well remember, was terribly nervous in those days, and it was only the wishes of mutual good friends, coupled with his own liking for the ballads, that finally induced him to publish the book at all." The text of this herald edition of "*Laus Veneris*" differs at various points from that included in the volume of "*Poems and Ballads*" which eventually appeared at the end of April 1866. The critics in the press denounced many of the pieces with a heat which did little credit to their judgement. Moxon shrank before the storm, and in July withdrew the volume from circulation. Another publisher was found in John Camden Hotten, to whom Swinburne now transferred all his other books. There had been no such literary scandal since the days of "*Don Juan*," but an attempt at prosecution fell through, and Ruskin, who had been requested to expostulate with the young poet, indignantly replied, "He is infinitely

above me in all knowledge and power, and I should no more think of advising or criticising him than of venturing to do it to Turner if he were alive again."

Swinburne now found himself the most talked-of man in England, but all this violent notoriety was unfortunate for him, morally and physically. He had a success of curiosity at the annual dinner of the Royal Literary Fund (2 May 1866), where, Lord Houghton being in the chair, Swinburne delivered the only public speech of his life; it was a short critical essay on "The Imaginative Literature of England" committed to memory. In the autumn he spent some time with Powell at Aberystwyth. His name was constantly before the public in the latter part of 1866, when his portraits/~~filled~~ the London shop-windows and the newspapers outdid each other in legendary tales of his eccentricity. He had published in the summer a selection from Byron, with an introduction of extreme eulogy, and in October he answered his critics in "Notes on Poems and Reviews"; W. M. Rossetti also published a volume in defence.

The winter was spent at Holmwood, near Henley-on-Thames, where his family was now settled; here in November he finished a large

book on Blake, which had occupied him for some time, and in February 1867 completed "A Song of Italy," which was published in September. His friends now included Simeon Solomon whose genius he extolled in the "Dark Blue" magazine and elsewhere. In April 1867, on a false report of the death of Charles Baudelaire (who survived until September of that year), Swinburne wrote "Ave atque Vale." This was a period of wild extravagance and of the least agreeable episodes of his life; his excesses told upon his health, which had already suffered, and there were several recurrences of his malady. In June, while staying with Lord Houghton at Fryston, he had a fit which left him seriously ill. In August, to recuperate, he spent some time with Lord Lytton at Knebworth, where he made the acquaintance of John Forster. In November he published the pamphlet of political verse called "An Appeal to England." The Reform League invited him to stand for Parliament; Swinburne appealed to Mazzini, to whom he had been introduced, in March 1867, by Karl Blind. Mazzini strongly discouraged the idea, advising him to confine himself to the cause of Italian freedom, and he declined. Swinburne now became intimate with Ada Isaacs Menken, who had left her fourth

and last husband, James Barclay. It has often been repeated that the poems of this actress, published as "Infelicia" early in 1868, were partly written by Swinburne, but this is not the case; and the verses, printed in 1883, as addressed by him to Ada Menken, were not composed by him. She went to Paris in the summer of 1868 and died there on 10 Aug.; the shock to Swinburne of the news caused an illness which lasted several days, for he was sincerely attached to her.

He was very busily engaged on political poetry during this year. In February 1868 he wrote "*The Hymn of Man*," and in April "*Tiresias*"; in June he published, in pamphlet form, "*Siena*." Two prose works belong to this year, "*William Blake*" and "*Notes on the Royal Academy*," but most of his energy was concentrated on the transcendental celebration of the Republic in verse. At the height of the scandal about "*Poems and Ballads*" there had been a meeting between Jowett and Mazzini at the house of George Howard (afterwards Earl of Carlisle), to discuss "what can be done *with* and *for* Algernon." Mazzini had instructed Karl Blind to bring the poet to visit him, and had said, "There must be no more of this love-frenzy; you must dedicate your glorious powers

to the service of the Republic." Swinburne's reply had been to sit at Mazzini's feet and to pour forth from memory the whole of "A Song of Italy." For the next three years he carried out Mazzini's mission, in the composition of "Songs before Sunrise."

His health was still unsatisfactory; he had a fit in the reading-room of the British Museum (10 July), and was ill for a month after it. He was taken down to Holmwood, and when sufficiently recovered started (September) for Etretat, where he and Powell hired a small villa which they named the Chaumière de Dolmancé. Here Offenbach visited them. The sea-bathing was beneficial, but on his return to London Swinburne's illnesses, fostered by his own obstinate imprudence, visibly increased in severity; in April 1869 he complained of "ill-health hardly intermittent through weeks and months." In July and September he spent some weeks at Vichy with Richard Burton, Leighton, and Mrs. Sartoris. He went to Holmwood for the winter and composed "Diræ" in December. In the summer of 1870 he and Powell settled again at Etretat; during this visit Swinburne, who was bathing alone, was carried out to sea on the tide and nearly drowned, but was picked up by a

smack, which carried him into Yport. At this time, too, the youthful Guy de Maupassant paid the friends a visit, of which he has given an entertaining account. When the Germans invaded France, Swinburne and Powell returned to England. In September Swinburne published the "Ode on the Proclamation of the French Republic." He now reappeared, more or less, in London artistic society, and was much seen at the houses of Westland Marston and Madox Brown. "Songs before Sunrise," with its prolonged glorification of the republican ideal, appeared early in 1871. In July and August of this year Swinburne stayed with Jowett in the little hotel at the foot of Loch Tummel. Here he made the acquaintance of Browning, who was writing "Hohenstiel-Schwangau." Browning was staying near by, and often joined the party. Swinburne, much recovered in health, was in delightful spirits; like Jowett, he was ardently on the side of France. In September he went off for a long walking-tour through the highlands of Scotland, and returned in splendid condition. The life of London, however, was always bad for him, and in October he was seriously ill again; in November he visited George Meredith at Kingston. He was now mixed up in much violent

polemic with Robert Buchanan and others; early in 1872 he published the most effective of all his satirical writings, the pungent "Under the Microscope." He had written the first act of "Bothwell," which F. Locker-Lampson set up in type for him; but this play, however, was not finished for several years. His intercourse with D. G. Rossetti had now ceased; his acquaintance with Mr. Theodore Watts began.

In July and August of this year he was again staying at Tummel Bridge with Jowett, and once more he was the life and soul of the party, enlivening the evenings with paradoxes and hyperboles and recitations of Mrs. Gamp. Jowett here persuaded Swinburne to join him in revising J. D. Rogers' "Children's Bible," which was published the following summer. In May 1873 the violence of Swinburne's attacks on Napoleon III (who was now dead) led to a remarkable controversy in the "Examiner" and the "Spectator." Swinburne had given up his rooms in Dorset Street, and lodged for a short time at 12 North Crescent, Alfred Place, whence he moved, in September 1873, to rooms at 3 Great James Street, where he continued to reside until he left London for good. Meanwhile he spent some autumn weeks with Jowett at Grantown. During this year he

was busily engaged in writing "Bothwell," to which he put the finishing touches in February 1874, and published some months later.

The greater part of January 1874 he spent with Jowett at the Land's End. Between March and September he was in the country, first at Holmwood, afterwards at Niton in the Isle of Wight. In April 1874 he was put, without his consent, and to his great indignation, on the Byron Memorial Committee. He was at this time chiefly devoting himself to the Elizabethan dramatists; an edition, with critical introduction, of Cyril Tourneur, had been projected at the end of 1872, but had been abandoned; but the volume on "George Chapman" was issued, in two forms, in December 1874. This winter was spent at Holmwood, whence in February 1875 Swinburne issued his introduction to the reprint of Wells's "Joseph and his Brethren." From early in June until late in October he was out of London—at Holmwood; visiting Jowett at West Malvern, where he sketched the first outline of "Erechtheus"; and in apartments, Middle Cliff, Wangford, near Southwold, in Suffolk. His monograph on "Auguste Vacquerie," in French, was published in Paris in November 1875; the English version appeared in the "Miscellanies"

of 1886. Two volumes of reprinted matter belong to this year, 1875; in prose "Essays and Studies," in verse "Songs of Two Nations"; and a pseudonymous pamphlet, attacking Buchanan, entitled "The Devil's Due." Most of 1876 was spent at Holmwood, with brief and often untoward visits to London. In July he was poisoned by lilies with which a too-enthusiastic hostess had filled his bedroom, and he did not completely recover until November. In the winter of this year appeared "Erechtheus" and "A Note on the Muscovite Crusade," and in December was written "The Ballad of Bulgarie," first printed as a pamphlet in 1893.

Admiral Swinburne, his father, died 4 March 1877. The poet sent his "*Charlotte Brontë*" to press in June, and then left town for the rest of the year, which he spent at Holmwood and again at Wangford, where he occupied himself in translating the poems of François Villon. He also issued, in a weekly periodical, his unique novel entitled "A Year's Letters," which he did not republish until 1905, when it appeared as "Love's Cross-Currents." In April 1878 Victor Hugo talked of addressing a poem of invitation to Swinburne, and a committee invited the latter to Paris in May to be present as the representative of

English poetry at the centenary of the death of Voltaire, but the condition of his health, which was deplorable during this year and the next, forbade his acceptance. In 1878 his chief publication was "Poems and Ballads (Second Series)."

Swinburne's state became so alarming that in September 1879 Mr. Theodore Watts, with the consent of Lady Jane Swinburne, removed him from 3 Great James Street to his own house, The Pines, Putney, where the remaining thirty years of his life were spent, in great retirement, but with health slowly and completely restored. Under the guardianship of his devoted companion, he pursued with extreme regularity a monotonous course of life, which was rarely diversified by even a visit to London, although it lay so near. Swinburne had, since about 1875, been afflicted with increasing deafness, which now (from 1879 onwards) made general society impossible for him. In 1880 he published three important volumes of poetry, "Studies in Song," "Heptalogia" (an anonymous collection of seven parodies), and "Songs of the Springtides"; and a volume of prose criticism, "A Study of Shakespeare." In April 1881 he finished the long ode entitled "Athens," and began "Tristram of Lyonesse"; "Mary Stuart" was published in this

year. In February 1882 he made the acquaintance of J. R. Lowell, who had bitterly attacked his early poems. Lowell was now "very pleasant" and the old feud was healed. In April, as he was writing the last canto of "Tristram," he was surprised by the news of D. G. Rossetti's death, and he wrote his (still unpublished) "Record of Friendship." In August Mr. Watts-Dunton took him for some weeks to Guernsey and Sark. In September, as he "wanted something big to do," Swinburne started a "Life and Death of Cæsar Borgia," of which the only fragment that remains was published in 1908 as "The Duke of Gandia." The friends proceeded to Paris for the dinner to Victor Hugo (22 Nov.) and the resuscitation of "Le Roi s'amuse" at the Théâtre Français. Swinburne was introduced for the first time to Hugo and to Leconte de Lisle, but he could not hear a line of the play, and on his return to Putney he refused to go to Cambridge to listen to the "Ajax," his infirmity now excluding him finally from public appearances.

To 1883 belongs "A Century of Roundels," which made Tennyson say, "Swinburne is a reed through which all things blow into music." In June of that year Swinburne visited Jowett at Emerald Bank, Newlands, Keswick. His history

now dwindles to a mere enumeration of his publications. "A Midsummer Holiday" appeared in 1884, "Marino Faliero" in 1885, "A Study of Victor Hugo" and "Miscellanies" in 1886, "Locrine" and a group of pamphlets of verse ("A Word for the Navy," "The Question," "The Jubilee," and "Gathered Songs") in 1887.

In June 1888 his public rupture with an old friend, Whistler, attracted notice; it was the latest ebullition of his fierce temper, which was now becoming wonderfully placid. His daily walk over Putney Heath, in the course of which he would waylay perambulators for the purposes of baby-worship, made him a figure familiar to the suburban public. Swinburne's summer holidays, usually spent at the sea-side with his inseparable friend, were the sources of much lyrical verse. In 1888 he wrote two of the most remarkable of his later poems, "The Armada" and "Pan and Thalassius." In 1889 he published "A Study of Ben Jonson" and "Poems and Ballads (Third Series)." His marvellous fecundity was now at length beginning to slacken; for some years he made but slight appearances. His latest publications were: "The Sisters" (1892); "Studies in Prose and Poetry" (1894); "Astrophel" (1894); "The Tale of Balen"

(1896); "Rosamund, Queen of the Lombards" (1899); "A Channel Passage" (1904); and "Love's Cross-Currents"—a reprint of the novel "A Year's Letters" of 1877—in 1905. In that year he wrote a little book about "Shakespeare," which was published posthumously in 1909. In November 1896 Lady Jane Swinburne died, in her eighty-eighth year, and was mourned by her son in the beautiful double elegy called "The High Oaks: Barking Hall."

Swinburne's last years were spent in great placidity, always under the care of his faithful companion. In November 1903 he caught a chill, which developed into double pneumonia, of which he very nearly died. Although under great care, he wholly recovered, his lungs remained delicate. In April 1909, just before the poet's seventy-second birthday, the entire household of Mr. Watts-Dunton was prostrated by influenza. In the case of Swinburne, who suffered most severely, it developed into pneumonia, and in spite of the resistance of his constitution the poet died on the morning of 10 April 1909. He was buried, 15 April, at Bonchurch, among the graves of his family. Swinburne left only one near relation behind him, his youngest sister, Miss Isabel Swinburne.

The physical characteristics of Algernon Swinburne were so remarkable as to make him almost unique. His large head was out of all proportion with his narrow and sloping shoulders; his slight body, and small, slim extremities, were accompanied by a restlessness that was often, but not correctly, taken for an indication of disease. Alternately he danced as if on wires or sat in an absolute immobility. His puny frame required little sleep, seemed impervious to fatigue, was heedless of the ordinary incentives of physical life; he inherited a marvellous constitution, which he impaired in early years, but which served his old age well. His character was no less strange than his physique. He was profoundly original, and yet he took the colour of his surroundings like a chameleon. He was violent, arrogant, even vindictive, and yet no one could be more affectionate, more courteous, more loyal. He was fierce in the defence of his prejudices, and yet dowered with an exquisite modesty. He loved everything that was pure and of good report, and yet the extravagance of his language was often beyond the reach of apology. His passionate love for very little children was entirely genuine and instinctive, and yet the forms of it seemed modelled on the

expressions of Victor Hugo. It is a very remarkable circumstance, which must be omitted in no outline of his intellectual life, that his opinions, on politics, on literature, on art, on life itself, were formed in boyhood, and that though he expanded he scarcely advanced in any single direction after he was twenty. If growth had continued as it began, he must have been the prodigy of the world, but his development was arrested, and he elaborated during fifty years the ideas, the convictions, the enthusiasms which he possessed when he left college. Even his art was at its height when he was five and twenty, and it was the volume and not the vigour that increased. As a magician of verbal melody he impressed his early contemporaries to the neglect of his merit as a thinker, but posterity will regard him as a philosopher who gave melodious utterance to ideas of high originality and value. This side of his genius, exemplified by such poems as "Hertha" and "Tiresias," was that which showed most evidence of development, yet his masterpieces in this kind also were mainly written before he was thirty-five.

No complete collection of Swinburne's works has appeared, but his poems were published in six volumes in 1904, and his tragedies in five in 1905-6.

The authentic portraits of Swinburne are not very numerous. D. G. Rossetti made a pencil drawing in 1860, and in 1862 a water-colour painting, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; the bust in oils, by G. F. Watts, May 1867, is now in the National Portrait Gallery. A water-colour drawing (*circa* 1863) by Simeon Solomon has disappeared. Miss E. M. Sewell made a small drawing in 1868, lately in the possession of Mrs. F. G. Waugh; a water colour, by W. B. Scott (*circa* 1860), is now in the possession of Mr. T. W. Jackson; a large pastel, taken in old age (Jan. 1900), by R. Ponsonby Staples, is in the possession of the writer of this memoir. A full-length portrait in water-colour was painted by A. Pellegrini, for reproduction in "Vanity Fair" in the summer of 1874; this drawing, which belonged to Lord Redesdale, was very generously given by him to me. Although avowedly a caricature, this is in many ways the best surviving record of Swinburne's general aspect and attitude.

[Personal recollections, extending in the case of the present writer over more than forty years; the memories of contemporaries at school and college, particularly those kindly contributed by Sir George Young, by the poet's cousin, Lord

Redesdale, and by Lord Sheffield; the bibliographical investigations of Mr. Thomas J. Wise, principally embodied in *A Contribution to the Bibliography of Swinburne* (published in Robertson, Nicoll & Wise's *Lit. Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century*, 1896, ii. 291-364, and more fully in his privately printed *Bibliography of Swinburne*, 1897); and the examination of a very large unpublished correspondence are the chief sources of information. To these must be added the valuable notes on *The Boyhood of Algernon Swinburne*, published in the *Contemporary Review* for April 1910 by another cousin, Mrs. Disney Leith. *The Life of Jowett* has some notes, unfortunately very slight, of the master of Balliol's life-long salutary influence over the poet, who had been and never ceased to be his pupil, and something is guardedly reported in the *Life of Lord Houghton*. Mr. Lionel Tollemache contributed to the *Spectator* and to the *Guardian* in 1909 some pleasant recollections. The recent *Life of Edmund Clarence Stedman*, by his granddaughter (New York, 1911) contains some very important autobiographical letters, and there are mentions in the *Autobiography of William Bell Scott*, and the privately printed *Diary of Henry Adams*

(quoted above). The name of Swinburne, with an occasional anecdote, occurs in many recent biographies, such as *The Autobiography of Elizabeth M. Sewell*, the *Recollections of Mr. A. G. C. Liddell*, the lives of *D. G. Rossetti*, *Edward Burne-Jones*, *Richard Burton*, *Whistler*, *John Churton Collins*, and *Ruskin*. *R. H. Shepherd's Bibliography of Swinburne* (1887) possesses little value. Swinburne left behind him a considerable number of short MSS., principally in verse. The prose tales have been recorded above, and certain of the verse; his posthumous poems, none of which have yet been published, also include a series of fine Northumbrian ballads.]

E. G.

LETTER
FROM
THE LORD REDESDALE, G.C.V.O.,
K.C.B.

1 KENSINGTON COURT

May 10, 1912

MY DEAR GOSSE,

Here are the criticisms which suggest themselves to me on Mr. ——'s letter to the "Times" about Swinburne's Eton days. You will see that my personal recollections do not tally with his.

Amina, the ghoul of the Arabian Nights, and the archetype of the genus, was a lady. But there are also male ghouls and even sexless ghouls, and it is to a subdivision of the latter that a certain species of literary ghouls must be referred. These batten upon the fame of the illustrious dead. An inspired poet or prophet, a Prince of Letters, passes away. That is your ghoul's opportunity. Immediately he indites a letter to the "Times" or to any other newspaper that will give him print, in a fever of impatience to give to the world what he is pleased to call his "reminiscences." He may never have known the great man, he may have just received a nod from him, or even have been cut dead—that is immaterial—upon the perilous foundation of that nod, or no-nod, he will build his crazy fabric.

Algernon Charles Swinburne died in the

spring of 1909. Revelling in the pleasures of the imagination Mr.—— at once fired off a letter to the "Times" upon the subject of Swinburne's Eton days, and in that letter there is hardly a word which does not show that the writer knew nothing about Swinburne, and that his vaunted friendship with the poet was a myth. In the first place Swinburne did not board at Coleidge's but at Joynes's. I doubt whether he ever set foot in the former house, for he was a very stay-at-home boy, shy and reserved—not at all given to gadding about in other houses and other boys' rooms. Had Mr.—— known him "fairly well," he must at least have remembered to what house he belonged. As a matter of fact I never saw them speak to one another. I was Swinburne's first cousin, and bound by ties of deep affection and gratitude to his mother—my aunt. During the first part of his stay at Eton, we were much together, and, as I shall show presently, very intimate. To my sorrow the friendship was interrupted by circumstances which unavoidably separated us. There was no quarrel, no shadow of a misunderstanding. But I was sent into College, Swinburne remained an oppidan. Between the collegers and the oppidans there was little or no traffic. —— also was a collegier, and

the same reason that parted Swinburne and me, closely related as we were, and intimate as we had been, would almost preclude — from even making his acquaintance outside of the schoolroom. Had there been any friendship between them it could hardly have escaped my knowledge. In 1853 I left college and became once more an oppidan: but it was too late: Swinburne had left or was just leaving. In after days our lives lay widely apart. Only once did I meet him in intimacy. We had a long delightful talk, but it was a flash in the pan. The fates drove us asunder again.

Swinburne entered Eton at the beginning of the Summer half of 1849. His father, the Admiral, and my aunt Lady Jane brought him, and at once sent for me to put him under my care. I was to "look after him." It is true that I was only a few weeks older than himself, and so, physically, not much of a protector; but I had already been three years at school, to which I was sent when I was nine years old, so I knew my Eton thoroughly, and was well versed in all its dear, delightful ways—mysteries bewildering to the uninitiated. I was already a little man of the world, at any rate of that microcosm which is a public school, and so I was able to steer my

small cousin through some shoals. What a fragile little creature he seemed as he stood there between his father and mother, with his wondering eyes fixed upon me! Under his arm he hugged his Bowdler's Shakespeare, a very precious treasure bound in brown leather with, for a marker, a narrow slip of ribbon, blue I think, with a button of that most heathenish marqueterie called Tunbridge ware dangling from the end of it. He was strangely tiny. His limbs were small and delicate, and his sloping shoulders looked far too weak to carry his great head, the size of which was exaggerated by the tousled mass of red hair standing almost at right angles to it. Hero-worshippers talk of his hair as having been a "golden aureole." At that time there was nothing golden about it. Red, violent, aggressive red it was, unmistakable, unpoetical carrots. His features were small and beautiful, chiselled as daintily as those of some Greek sculptor's masterpiece. His skin was very white—not unhealthy, but a transparent tinted white, such as one sees in the petals of some roses. His face was the very replica of that of his dear mother, and she was one of the most refined and lovely of women. His red hair must have come from the Admiral's side, for I never heard of a red-

haired Ashburnham. The Admiral himself, whom I rarely saw, was, so well as my memory serves me, already grizzled, but his hair must have been originally very fair or even red. Another characteristic which Algernon inherited from his mother was the voice. All who knew him must remember that exquisitely soft voice with a rather sing-song intonation, like that of Russians when they put the music of their own Slav voices into the French language. All his mother's brothers and sisters had it. He alone, so far as I know, among my cousins reproduced it. Listening to him sometimes I could almost fancy that I could hear my aunt herself speaking, so startling was the likeness. His language, even at that age, was beautiful, fanciful, and richly varied. Altogether my recollection of him in those school-days is that of a fascinating, most loveable little fellow. It is but a child's impression of another child. But I believe it to be just.

We rapidly became friends. Of course, being in separate houses, we could not be so constantly together as if we had both been in the same house. I was at Evans' and Durnford was my tutor. He was at Joynes's and of course Joynes was his tutor. Still we often met, and pretty frequently breakfasted together, he with me, or I

with him. Chocolate in his room, tea in mine. The guest brought his own "order" of rolls and butter, and the feast was made rich by the addition of sixpennyworth of scraped beef or ham from Joe Groves's, a small sock-shop which was almost immediately under Joynes's house. Little gifts such as our humble purses could afford cemented our friendship: I still possess and treasure an abbreviated edition of Froissart's *Chronicles* which Algernon gave me now, alas! sixty-three years ago. We ourselves were abbreviated editions in those days, or rather duodecimos!

It was at Eton that he began to feel his wings. His bringing up at home had been scrupulously strict. His literary diet the veriest pap. His precocious brain had been nourished upon food for babes. Not a novel had he been allowed to open, not even Walter Scott's. Shakespeare he only knew through the medium of his precious brown Bowdler. ———'s picture of Swinburne sitting by the fire reading poetry is rank nonsense: he had not the books: his school work was prepared, as in the case of other boys, in his room: his reading for pleasure was done in the boys' library in Weston's yard. I can see him now sitting perched up Turk-or-tailor-wise in one of the windows looking out on the yard, with

some huge old-world tome, almost as big as himself, upon his lap, the afternoon sun setting on fire the great mop of red hair. There it was that he emancipated himself, making acquaintance with Shakespeare (minus Bowdler), Marlowe, Spenser, Ben Jonson, Ford, Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher, and the other poets and playwrights of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His tendency was greatly towards the Drama, especially the Tragic Drama. He had a great sense of humour in others; he would quote Dickens, especially Mrs. Gamp, unwearyingly; but his own genius leaned to tragedy. No less absurd is it to say that as a boy "he had an extraordinarily wide knowledge of the Greek poets, which he read with ease in the original." His study of the Greek tragedians, upon whose work he so largely modelled his own, came much later in life. At Eton these were lessons, and lessons are odious; besides, you cannot assimilate Aeschylus in homoeopathic doses of thirty lines, and he knew no more Greek than any intelligent boy of his age would do, nor did he take any prominent place in the regular school work, though he was a Prince Consort's prize man for modern languages. His first love in literature was given to the English poets, and after, or to-

gether with, these he devoured the great classics of France and Italy. His memory was wonderful, his power of quotation almost unlimited. We used to take long walks together in Windsor Forest and in the Home Park, where the famous oak of Herne the Hunter was still standing, a white, lightning-blasted skeleton of a tree, a fitting haunt for "fairies, black, grey, green and white," and a very favourite goal of our expeditions. As he walked along with that peculiar dancing step of his, his eyes gleaming with enthusiasm, and his hair, like the Zazzera of the old Florentines, tossed about by the wind, he would pour out in his unforgettable voice the treasures which he had gathered at his last sitting. Other boys would watch him with amazement, looking upon him as a sort of inspired elfin-something belonging to another sphere. None dreamt of interfering with him—as for bullying there was none of it. He carried with him one magic charm—he was absolutely courageous. He did not know what fear meant. It is generally the coward, the weakling in character, far more than the weakling in thews and sinews, that is bullied. Swinburne's pluck as a boy always reminds me of Kinglake's description in "Eothen" of Dr. Keate, the famous head master

of Eton: "He was little more (if more at all) than five feet in height, and was not very great in girth, but within this space was concentrated the pluck of ten battalions." That was Swinburne all over, and puny as he was, I verily believe, that had any boy, however big, attempted to bully him, that boy would have caught a Tartar. Of games he took no heed; I do not think that he ever possessed a cricket bat, but of walking and swimming he never tired. And so he led a sort of charmed life—a fairy child in the midst of a commonplace, workaday world. As Horace said of himself, "*Non sine Dis animosus infans.*"

As for the fabulous race to Pote Williams' shop for the first copy of "Maud" in 1855, which Mr.—— "believes" he won, it is enough to say that as Swinburne left Eton in 1853, it must have taken place in dreamland. Upon that subject the letter of Mr. Cornish which appeared in the same day's "Times" as that of Mr.—— is authoritative and incontrovertible. Poor Mr.——! How little he thought that the same column of the "Times" would contain his invention and its contradiction: the poison and the antidote.

One more trait which you may like to find room for. I have told you about his courage. He was no horseman and had no opportunity at

home for riding. But in the matter of horses he was absolutely without terror. He, unskilled though he was, would ride anything, as fearless as a Centaur. Rides with his cousin, Lady Katherine Ashburnham (afterwards Banneiman) were among his great delights in that glorious forest-like Country above Ashburnham Place.

There is no truth in the story, how coined I know not, that Swinburne disliked Eton. There Mr.—— is, as an exception, correct. The poet was not made of the stuff which moulds the enthusiastic schoolboy, and I much doubt whether any school would, as such, have appealed to him. But Eton stands by itself. Its old traditions and its chivalrous memories, its glorious surroundings, meant for him something more than mere school: he looked back upon the gray towers, Windsor, the Forest, the Brocas, the Thames, Cuckoo Weir—with an affection which inspired his commemoration ode, and which, I believe, never left him. The place touched his poet's soul as no other school could have done, and so it fitted him.

Believe me to be,

My dear Gosse,

Yours sincerely,

REDESDALE.

EDMUND GOSSE, ESQ.

